

**PRO-MESAS PROGRAMMING EXPERIENCE AND LESSONS:
AN ASSESSMENT**

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ACRONYMS

CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
CTA	Canadian Technical Advisor
EFA	Education For All program
EPRC	Executive Program Review Committee
HIPC	Highly Indebted Poor Country
IDRC	International Development Research Centre
LTA	Local Technical Adviser
NC/CN	Nota Conceptual/Concept Note
CCO/OCC	Canadian Cooperation Office
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OM	Outcome Mapping
PAC	Program Administration Committee
PAD	Project Approval Document
PI	Program Initiative
PRC	Program Review Committee
PRS	Poverty Reduction Strategy
RBM	Results Based Management
UNDP	United Nations Development Program

PREFACE

After one year of program implementation, mostly dedicated to planning in collaboration with national stakeholders, the PRO-MESAS team has commissioned an external assessment of their experiences and what has been learned to date. The expected output is to provide documentation and an analysis of what has worked, what hasn't and why in PRO-MESAS programming activities and highlight strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges. This assessment is not to be considered a formal external evaluation for accountability or legitimization purposes. Rather, it represents a participatory learning process for the PRO-MESAS team to help systematize and facilitate team learning for the purpose of informing future programming initiatives.

A call for proposals was sent out to a number of possible service providers and proposals received were reviewed by the PRO-MESAS team. The author of this report was selected to conduct the assessment and, in fulfillment of its role as leader of the learning systems Program Initiative (PI), IDRC issued terms of reference and a contract in Mid March, 2004.

The terms of reference and objectives for the consultant are:

To carry out an assessment of the PRO-MESAS experience in order to:

- Identify lessons learned (what works, what doesn't, and why);
- Analyze conditions of implementation;
- Identify key issues for future focus;
- Suggest strategies for capturing lessons learned on a continual basis.

The main sources of information for the assessment have been: a series of semi-structured interviews with 20 PRO-MESAS team members and associated personnel in Honduras; interviews with officials in CIDA and IDRC headquarters; review of background planning documents for the program from both CIDA and IDRC; and, current monitoring, reporting and planning documents produced by the team in Honduras. A list of people interviewed and list of documents consulted are attached as Annexes 1 and 2.

Several other complementary reviews and assessments are being undertaken in parallel with this "learning systems" assessment. While there is some overlap, each initiative is being conducted from a different perspective and duplication of efforts and issues addressed are being avoided as much as possible. Other studies include: CIDA headquarters assessment of PRO-MESAS team functioning; CIDA headquarters review/audit of PRO-MESAS administrative procedures and decision-making processes; and, establishment of a PRO-MESAS Performance Review Framework.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

Driven by new thinking in Canada and internationally on how to strengthen aid effectiveness, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) together developed the Pro-Mesas Program consistent with the guiding principles and strategic programming areas defined in the Honduras Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS). To accomplish this, PRO-MESAS would support and strengthen the *mesas sectoriales* and other official collaborative forums at the national, departmental, and municipal levels in Honduras. Through these spaces for consensus building, priority setting, and development planning, PRO-MESAS would generate and validate its plans for activities and projects.

An additional dimension of the PRO-MESAS program has been its designation as one of six CIDA pilot projects intended to test new programming approaches aligned with principles enunciated in CIDA's *Strengthening Aid Effectiveness* (2001) document. Pilot experimental programming initiatives are expected to help CIDA learn from the entire process of the planning, design, implementation and review cycle. Objectives of both CIDA and IDRC are to demonstrate, document and learn about more effective ways of delivering supporting services to development initiatives.

After a little more than one year of operation, this assessment report discusses the Pro-Mesas implementation experience from a number of important perspectives and provides some suggestions for future programming.

Decentralized decision-making

Decentralized decision-making was introduced by CIDA in line with principles of improved effectiveness of aid by ensuring timely and opportune interventions that take into consideration local needs and the changing social, economic and political contexts. The importance of local team decision-making, peer review processes, and a flat organizational structure was emphasized to bring decisions closer to the action arena, accommodate all relevant perspectives, and to involve local stakeholders and partners in project planning, design, and implementation. But, it was not as easy to design and implement a decentralized decision-making project structure as was anticipated.

The parameters of the program were set within the context of a formal bilateral program arrangement between governments. A bilateral commission was formed to which the program would report. Interaction was expected to take place within the context of the "*Mesas Sectoriales*" perceived as forums for priority and programming decisions on a sector basis. The decentralization of decision-making implied was at this national and sector level. The *mesas*, however, did not develop as anticipated and the Pro-Mesas team explored alternative opportunities for local programming.

Initially, a clear definition of roles and responsibilities was lacking and the team made a valiant effort to implement egalitarian, participatory principles while organizing and

initiating new programming efforts. This included design and introduction of decision-making processes and instruments. From a CIDA management perspective, taking program structuring, planning and implementation decisions all at the same time appeared dysfunctional and inefficient in the use of resources. This situation was eventually addressed by CIDA through the introduction of a more hierarchical management structure and the establishment of clear leadership and decision-making responsibilities which respond more closely to CIDA accountability requirements.

Decentralized decision-making was never a blank cheque to the degree anticipated by some team members. This was clear from the beginning in CIDA headquarters decisions and actions as recorded in a number of background documents but it was not communicated directly to the team. In fact, one could say that contradictory signals were given with respect to the implementation of the pilot projects and breaking with more rigid standard CIDA and Canadian government procedures. All members of the PRO-MESAS team need to recognize that there are limitations or boundaries on local decision-making within which they must work. These boundaries are set by CIDA and follow CIDA rules. The challenge for the team is to be creative about finding effective ways of working within the limits while seeking to improve program effectiveness.

Multi-stakeholder processes

In line with its adopted aid effectiveness principles, CIDA anticipated that tri-partite (government, donors & civil society) *mesas sectoriales* would provide multi-stakeholder focal points for sector oriented intervention planning and approval for its bilateral program in Honduras. While these *mesas* are now barely functioning, other opportunities have been explored to promote multi-stakeholder interaction. Lacking the anticipated national level entry, team members have participated in the creation of informal regional and local mesas or groups where problems and actions are identified and actions planned. Much of PRO-MESAS programming to date has been built on an interpretation of the “*Mesa*” concept as a multi-stakeholder process within and across levels of interest and authority linking local concertation (operational level) with national interests (policy and program level). Achieving civil society participation has been challenging and will take time to develop as there is little tradition of taking initiative at this level.

What has evolved from the creative efforts of the PRO-MESAS team is something more dynamic than planned, still based on the original principles and objectives, but with a realistic and functional implementation plan. They have shown that *mesas*, as multi-stakeholder forums, can help in making the allocation of resources more efficient when focussed on a distinct and mutually understood problem. To be effective, they should be organic in nature, programmed in an open inclusive manner and avoid the more rigid structures of traditional project delivery mechanisms. They can feed into the functioning and evolution of existing political and implementation structures. *Mesas* are likely not permanent fixtures as their effective spaces for dialogue are purpose driven and time limited. They can provide a dynamic set of renewable, evolving spaces for multi-stakeholder planning interventions and action on mutually identified needs. At the local and regional levels, team members expressed great faith in the *mesa* concept for creating spaces to involve all actors in debate and a search for solutions to specific issues or problems.

Integrated and Participatory Programming

Integrated programming takes a development needs perspective on diverse, inter-connected issues and processes and seeks to avoid isolation in sector compartments. The approach is characterized by multi-stakeholders dealing with cross-sector themes at local operational and national policy levels. It involves a multi-sector vision involving coordinated planning and a process by which actors from various sectors are brought together to intervene in an area or problem. Experimenting with an integrated approach was a new experience for team members who were used to working in well-defined projects on a sector interest basis. Challenges were encountered in incorporating transverse themes and social issues related to education, health and gender. Budget allocation was also a challenge as Pro-Mesas was programmed on sector lines.

Various perceptions of integration in general reflected 2 approaches: i) an area, group or problem focus; and, ii) a sector or service delivery integration process. It was suggested that Pro-Mesas programming should look for “areas of collaboration” rather than sector integration. This is because local demands for services and inputs are usually more dispersed than in a sector-focused approach. The specialist paradigm has to be modified in participatory processes to take account of local knowledge and accept it as relevant and valuable. People are learning by doing in these processes and require time to internalize the many messages coming their way.

Organizational development for programming

The success of the program depends very much on how the PRO-MESAS team organizes its interactions, processes, decision-making and communication. Original priorities were set at headquarters based on past investment in specific areas (Olancho and the North Coast) and sectors of agriculture, forestry and environment within the existing CIDA country programming framework. In addition to those traditional sectors related to agriculture and natural resources management, CIDA opened 3 new sectors of intervention: water and sanitation, health and education. From this base, an investment strategy was gradually developed. In addition, some management processes and instruments have been developed by the team to supplement those of the UNDP which were found to be inadequate.

A team coordinator was appointed who has the support and respect of all team members. This is an important position for maintaining the sense of responsibility and initiative inherent in the team whose personal qualities and professional competence is outstanding. The combination of experienced CTAs and LTAs on the team is a great strength which has led to a relatively fast start compared to traditional program organization processes.

The PRO-MESAS program organizational development has been a more difficult and expensive process than may have been necessary. Little guidance was provided from CIDA at the outset on the limits and implementation of decentralization but a sense of experimentation within a new pilot programming mode inspired team members. It appeared to the reviewer that, although a more formalized RBM-based structure was

eventually introduced by CIDA, most of the applied programming decisions were a product of the initial highly participatory process. Much of the important interaction within the team and with clients appears to have been preserved.

Learning and systematization

Learning and systematization are important components of knowledge-based organizations and programs. A learning organization has the capacity to capture learning at different levels, (individual, team and corporate), and systematically use it to generate new, and broader, capabilities.

Learning is generally understood as a process involving observation, activity, experimentation, reflection, awareness and internalization of lessons drawn from one or all of these aspects together. It is often implicit rather than explicit.

Systematization assumes multiple actors or perspectives in a dynamic and complex social context where a common interpretation is important to inform communication, decisions and action. It leads to a result in terms of: a) extracting lessons learned; b) better understanding of current practice; c) documentation and dissemination of useful experience; and, d) follow-up action in the form of improved practices.

A commonly expressed expectation was that, since IDRC is responsible for the learning and systematization PI, they would take the initiative to design and implement these activities for the Pro-Mesas pilot program. This is seen as a very important role although it was not clear to the team members how this would be carried out. Design and implementation of a system for capturing and interpreting information on “enabling results” are considered as a high priority.

CIDA-IDRC relationship and a systematization strategy

CIDA and IDRC objectives are to learn, demonstrate and document effective ways of delivering supporting services to the development efforts of a range of actors in Honduras. A key strategic element for the program is recognizing and documenting the influence and effects of “enabling results” through implementation of a systematization strategy. Adapting the IDRC problem specific research approach and methods to the CIDA program approach, and accountability as defined by RBM, is a major challenge. Building communication bridges between IDRC and CIDA on these issues and between PRO-MESAS actors and their several audiences is another challenge.

A monitoring system is required for the program as a whole as well as for each component part. Performance reporting elements specified for the program include:

- Enabling results
- Development results
- Program management results

IDRC is exploring more explicit ways in which documenting and systematization of “enabling” activities can contribute to the program and CIDA. These involve many facilitating and supportive activities. Documenting these activities will provide a trail of

evidence which demonstrates their influence on change for which the program can take credit. This represents a great opportunity to explore, validate and demonstrate the application of fundamental development and social evolution concepts in an operational setting.

Capturing “enabling results” entails:

- a) defining a clear **vision** of expected change closely related to that of the PRS of the GOH;
- b) defining **mission** statements linked to the vision and setting explicit goals for the interventions of each of the five operational PIs as well as for program management;
- c) **activities** of the team, projects and partners related to the PI mission need to be systematically documented in regular reports. Enabling result activities can be documented by a system of simple notes to file as events unfold;
- d) **systematization** – synthesis and interpretation of information in reports and notes on a regular basis will identify trends, changes, and influences attributable to program actions;
- e) **reflection** – regular, structured, team meetings to reflect on the implications of systematization reports and take appropriate implementation decisions.

The design and implementation of this system will take significant effort but IDRC is willing to provide support to explore its possibilities and closer CIDA/IDRC linkages.

PRO-MESAS PROGRAMMING EXPERIENCE AND LESSONS: AN ASSESSMENT

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Antecedents

CIDA has worked for over 25 years in Honduras, with programming primarily in the natural resources sectors of forestry, agriculture, water, and electrical energy. Geographically, CIDA activities have focused on the Department of Olancho and the Departments of the North Coast Region. While such endeavors generally have met with success at the project-level, their broader impact at the policy or national level has been hampered by the lack of an overall vision or plan for national development.

Hurricane Mitch was a turning point for Honduran development planning. The extensive damage caused by this disaster forced not only Honduran society but also the international community to work together to set priorities for reconstruction. Following Hurricane Mitch, Governments of the region met with the international community at Consultative Group meetings in Washington in late 1998, and in Stockholm in May 1999, and agreed to a set of goals and principles to guide reconstruction efforts and the transformation of the region.

The Stockholm Declaration:

- Reduce the social and ecological vulnerability of the region as the over-riding goal;
- Reconstruct and transform Central America on the basis of an integrated approach of transparency and good governance;
- Consolidate democracy and good governance, reinforcing the process of decentralization of governmental functions and powers, with the active participation of civil society;
- Promote respect for human rights as a permanent objective. The promotion of equality between women and men and of the rights of children, ethnic groups, and other minorities should be given attention;
- Coordinate donor efforts, guided by priorities set by the recipient countries;
- Intensify efforts to reduce the external debt burden of the countries of the region.

Following Stockholm, and in an effort to qualify for the Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) debt relief program, Honduras undertook a national consultation exercise and produced a Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) in 2001. The goals established in the PRS are consistent with the Millennium Development Goals proclaimed by the OECD donor countries in 2000. Subsequently, the Government of President Ricardo Maduro translated the general objectives and strategies of the PRS into a *Plan de Gobierno 2002-2006*, including more specific objectives and sectorial strategies. Government-civil society-donor coordination mechanisms initiated during the preparation of the PRS, such as the *mesas sectoriales*, were continued as forums for priority setting, dialogue, and collaboration in implementing the PRS principles and programming areas as follows.

Poverty Reduction Strategy – Guiding Principles:

- Prioritize actions that tend to sustainably reduce poverty;
- Prioritize actions favoring the least-advantaged groups and regions of the country;
- Strengthen civil society participation and decentralization;
- Strengthen governance and participatory democracy;
- Reduce environmental vulnerability and its impact on poverty.

Poverty Reduction Strategy – Strategic Programming Areas:

- Accelerating equitable and sustainable economic growth;
- Poverty reduction in rural areas;
- Reducing urban poverty;
- Investing in human capital;
- Strengthening social protection for specific groups;
- Guaranteeing the sustainability of the Strategy.

1.2 PRO-MESAS design

Given this new context in Honduras, and driven also by new thinking in Canada and internationally on strengthening aid effectiveness, CIDA and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) developed the PRO-MESAS Program putting the Honduran PRS front-and-centre. Programming was to be consistent with the guiding principles and strategic programming areas defined in the PRS and was expected to contribute to the achievement of the PRS goals in terms of development results. To accomplish this, PRO-MESAS would support and strengthen the *mesas sectoriales* and other official collaborative fora at the national, departmental, and municipal levels, as a method for consensus building, priority setting, and development planning. PRO-MESAS would participate in the *mesas* and other forums to generate and validate planned activities and projects.

In order to build on prior CIDA development programming in Honduras, CIDA decided to concentrate Pro-Mesas programming, initially, in the Departments of Olancho and the North Coast. This would be complemented by programming at the national level aiming to facilitate creation of sound legal and policy frameworks and build capacity for their implementation.

PRO-MESAS was also expected to build on IDRC experience in research-based programming in Honduras and by promoting the concept and implementation of “learning systems for development”. IDRC’s stated goal was to strengthen the capacity of people and institutions in Honduras to plan and implement development policies, activities and projects through the integration and application of information and knowledge drawn from a range of sources.

PRO-MESAS programming was to be multi-sector in nature, but with emphasis on the natural resources sectors of agriculture, forestry and environment, and the social services sectors of education, health and water and sanitation. It was also expected to integrate gender equality, environmental sustainability, decentralization, and good governance as crosscutting themes during all phases of program planning and implementation. Where appropriate, these crosscutting themes would also be expressed through explicit targeted activities.

PRO-MESAS Advisors have worked in collaboration with *mesas sectoriales*, government counterparts, and local representatives to identify development challenges and opportunities, and from these, programming priorities. Through this process the following Program Initiatives (PI)s have been identified:

- PI 1: Building Capacity at the National Level
- PI 2: Olancho Poverty Reduction and Sustainable Development
- PI 3: North Coast Poverty Reduction and Sustainable Development
- PI 4: Extension to Other Regions
- PI 5: Developing Learning Systems

Each of these PIs is intended to contribute to achieving the PRS results, and consist of projects and sub-projects across all of the PRO-MESAS sectors. The mix of projects undertaken in each PI depends on the specific development priorities identified by the relevant local planning groups and *mesas sectoriales* with support from PRO-MESAS Advisors.

To facilitate this programming, a PRO-MESAS office has been established in Tegucigalpa, staffed by Canadian Technical Advisors (CTAs) and Honduran Local Technical Advisors (LTAs) for each of the above sectors, two Advisors from IDRC working on learning systems development, and a Canadian Program Management Advisor responsible for performance review and information management. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Business Centre in Tegucigalpa was contracted to provide procurement, contracting, and financial management services to CIDA funded PI activities.

1.3 CIDA pilot programming

An additional dimension of the PRO-MESAS program has been its designation as one of six pilot programs launched in 2001 by CIDA in the Americas, Africa, Asia and the Middle East. These pilots are intended to test new programming approaches aligned with principles enunciated in CIDA's *Strengthening Aid Effectiveness* document. The objective is to experiment with ways in which the Agency might change the way it functions as a development organization and improve the impact of its programming.

Fundamental to this change, is a recognition of development as a process broader than a project-based sector approach. It takes on the challenges of a more comprehensive and knowledge-based accompaniment of a country's institutions, at various levels, in the implementation of its own national development plan or poverty reduction strategy. This approach implies more integrated and consultative programming mechanisms and consideration of a wide range of social, economic, political, environmental and cultural factors. Pilot experimental programming initiatives, such as the PRO-MESAS program, are expected to help CIDA learn from the entire process of their planning, design, implementation and review by the Agency. They should also indicate changes in program management and competencies required to implement a more collaborative and decentralized development co-operation dynamic.

In this "learning" context, CIDA and IDRC agreed to collaborate in Honduras. IDRC had considerable experience with participatory methods of project design and implementation, especially at the local level, while CIDA was eager to try more open and interactive, principles in its programming. The objectives of both Agencies were to demonstrate, document and learn about more effective ways of delivering supporting services to development efforts in one of the poorest countries in the region. Each brings its own expertise to bear with a built in learning strategy intended to inform future programming and collaboration. Although IDRC representatives form an integral part of the PRO-MESAS team, the Centre manages all aspects of programming, procurement, contracting, and financial management for the Learning Systems PI.

2. PERSPECTIVES ON KEY THEMES in PRO-MESAS IMPLEMENTATION

In this section, discussion is organized around the main themes addressed in the interviews with PRO-MESAS personnel in Honduras. For the most part, it is a synthesis of the interviewees response to the "Interview Guide" questions posed by the consultant. These are complemented by additional observations and context drawn from a review of background documents and from the consultant's own experience.

Discussion begins with views on the meaning and implementation of decentralized decision-making in the PRO-MESAS context. This is followed by comments on multi-stakeholder processes and then perceptions of integrated programming and project development. The fourth section, organizational development for programming, summarizes team member observations on organizing to meet the challenges of responding to the expectations and situations described in the first three sections. The

final sections under this heading summarize observations on learning and systematization in the program as well as the role of IDRC and its relationship with CIDA. All themes overlap to some degree, hence similar observations are encountered from several perspectives.

2.1 Decentralized decision-making

2.1.1 Context and background

Decentralized decision-making is implied in the principles for more effective use of aid dollars enunciated in CIDA's "Strengthening Aid Effectiveness" document, 2001. Conceptually, PRO-MESAS was built on these principles, especially the following:

- local ownership and accountability;
- local project development in concert with stakeholders;
- untying aid to get the best value for aid dollar spent;
- multilateral cooperation among donors; and,
- strengthening field presence with sector advisers to assist *mesas*.

How these intentions would be operationalized was not addressed specifically in the PRO-MESAS concept documents but all are being realized to varying degrees.

The PRO-MESAS approval documents outlined the governance and management structure for the program and the set of documents which would be required for approval and reporting purposes. A team of Canadian technical advisers would report to a joint Honduran Government-CIDA program Commission and prepare an integrated PRO-MESAS investment strategy including annual work plans and budgets by sector for the Commission's approval. The Commission would meet once a year to review and approve the investment strategy and updates including ongoing annual work plans and budgets. Specific projects would only be included in the annual work plans after being validated by peer review and presented to the appropriate sector table following a request from a ministry, municipality or civil society organization. An arrangement was made with the UNDP Business Unit in Honduras for procurement services and financial disbursements, and projects thus approved would be submitted to that unit for administration.

One of the first steps in the Program was to establish initiatives in Olancho and the North Coast, the two CIDA priority geographic areas in the country. This was seen as a unique opportunity to work in more direct contact with key stakeholders in the local development environment. Making decisions at this level had significant implications for the way CIDA would operate. Approval would need to be carried out quickly and resources fielded as soon as possible to maintain momentum. Procurement would need to be done locally using international procurement methodologies and standards and this in turn implied an accountability framework adapted to decentralized planning and decision-making.

The above paragraphs describe generally how things were viewed from headquarters and from the perspective of those planning the pilot approach to PRO-MESAS. Because the program was built on prior CIDA supported work in Honduras, the new team involved a combination of very experienced Canadian and Honduran staff members along with a group of competent younger Honduran technical staff. As a result, the range of observations from their various perspectives represents an interesting and instructive view on the expectations and experiences of the team during the initiation phase of the program. Great emphasis was put on the importance of local decision-making, peer review processes, and a flat organizational structure within the context of an experimental pilot project. As a result, and in the absence of a clear definition of roles and responsibilities from CIDA, the team made a valiant effort to implement these principles while simultaneously initiating major programming efforts.

2.1.2 Staff expectations and reactions

Staff expectations with respect to decentralized decision-making seem to fall into three categories: high expectations for a degree of freedom from bureaucratic procedures; skeptical to cautious optimism that headquarters would trust field decisions; and, negative or no expectations that anything would come of it. The more optimistic team members anticipated: that processes would become more efficient and effective in use of resources; that the team could experiment with ways of breaking free from more highly structured and pre-planned CIDA procedures; that decisions would be based on CTA and LTA knowledge; and, that they could respond to local needs as they arose and were articulated. Those with longer experience in program implementation and management expressed hope the team would be given enough time to organize and pursue a more organic, bottom-up approach. Another expectation was that the Honduras Government would have more say on priorities and links to its own planning and that a model of collaboration would evolve capable of demonstrating improved governance.

The general response to fulfillment of these expectations so far has generally been positive and satisfactory. Although the process of arriving at the current situation has been frustrating at times, and time consuming, the decision-making situation has been very dynamic. In the view of several respondents, there has been more freedom to influence and participate in decisions than anticipated and this is valued. Some feel, however, that recently introduced more structured management procedures are too slow and cumbersome. There is general satisfaction with the level of team participation in decisions related to programming and a lot of effort to be participatory, respond to local realities and inform officials. However, frustration is evident with the slow and bureaucratic means of funding the decisions once taken. Most team members are not satisfied with the UNDP arrangement for procurement and disbursement of funds..

For those working in the field, the process seems slow, but realistic for local conditions, and a step ahead in comparison to earlier top down sector design and implementation modes where they had little say or influence in decision-making. There is a strong feeling that things are working out reasonably well because of a professional team which has reached a good understanding on how to proceed.

2.1.3 Difficulties and solutions

The biggest difficulties encountered surrounded the early team development process and the absence of clearly defined guidelines setting out roles and responsibilities. The team was left to define its own leadership and operational procedures while being encouraged to plan and implement activities quickly. This resulted in long, unstructured meetings and attempts to make all decisions by consensus. From a CIDA management perspective, the team's program structuring, planning and implementation all at the same time appeared dysfunctional and inefficient in the use of resources. Eventually, the situation was resolved through the introduction by CIDA of a more hierarchical management structure. This recent regime establishes clear leadership and decision-making responsibilities and responds to CIDA's accountability requirements. Peer review of programming proposals and local planning have been maintained, however, facilitated by a coordinator respected by all team members.

A few Honduran team members feel that the new procedures reduce their input to decision-making and a criticism was made that Canadian PI managers tend to be too sector focused. Because Concept Notes (NCs) now reach the Program Review Committee (PRC) after participatory discussion in smaller working groups, they may not get as detailed a review at PRC as these members would like, especially in those areas related to cross-cutting social issues. These differences are not unusual in this kind of initiative. More than anything, this is probably a communication and negotiation issue which can be managed within the team through clearer documentation of participatory processes in NC preparation and sensitivity to the comments of PRC members. The author's impression was that the PI leaders function appropriately as integrated program managers.

An example of how the effectiveness of local decision-making processes can be affected by decisions taken in headquarters was evident in the case of education. The Education For All (EFA) program was attached to PRO-MEASAS without consultation on implementation. A considerable proportion of one team member's time was taken up by this program which delayed planning and management structure development. The extra work skewed the balance of PRO-MESAS programming through decisions taken at headquarters without reference to planning and decision-making processes in Honduras.

This situation has created some anxiety in the team with respect to CIDA commitment to a decentralized programming process which they feel is showing positive results in spite of all its start-up difficulties. It was suggested that, for headquarters officials to understand the realities of implementing local decision-making in Honduras, they need to spend time in the field to see the constraints, opportunities and progress first hand.

2.1.4 Observations and lessons

It is important for growth and development to promote and support open, participatory, inclusive processes and take into account local perspectives. Decisions must come from the basic actors, local people, in defining needs and content. This creates confidence and

trust, important elements for developing local capability. This is being demonstrated in various PRO-MESAS activities.

The level of ownership of PRO-MESAS by the team is very strong and endowed with a positive team spirit. The processes that have evolved for programming and decision-making, despite some difficulties, contribute to a common vision and dedication which spills over to local clients and collaborators. The recently appointed coordinator is well accepted and in an excellent position to foster, consolidate and manage this situation.

On the difficulty side, it is clear that defining and implementing a new programming and decision-making system simultaneously creates confusion and leads to wasted resources. At the overall programming level, clear definition of priorities, roles, responsibilities and operating instruments for management and accountability are needed from the start to define the context within which more specific program components will operate. This should not be confused with integrated planning and programming processes where participation of local groups is important. At this project level, planning and implementation sequentially with iterative feedback loops is an important learning process

For the team, it was not as easy to design and implement a decentralized decision-making process as many individuals expected. Some discrepancy in perspective was apparent on what decentralized decision-making was intended to entail and how it should be implemented. Having the freedom to decide locally on local needs and initiatives provides greater flexibility to local programming. This same level of flexibility and independence may be more constrained at the national level where a different group of actors and elements, and their interactions, comes into play. These differences need to be recognized and managed creatively according to context. In a sense, the challenge is not as much “decentralized decision-making” as “decision-making in context” and influencing decisions where higher levels of authority are clearly involved.

All members of the team need to recognize that there are limitations or boundaries on decentralized decision-making within which they must work. These boundaries are set by CIDA and follow CIDA rules. The challenge locally is to be creative about finding effective ways of working within the limits while responding to the challenge of improving effectiveness through more responsive decentralized programming and decision-making.

Decisions taken locally on which projects to support require a recognized process and system in order to be selective, strategic and transparent. It is important to do good diligence up-front and then to monitor progress closely as unexpected happenings can take place in collaborating institutions and partners affecting the viability and progress of funded activities. The PRC needs to insist on compliance and be prepared to abandon an activity for appropriate cause if necessary. This represents the flexibility of a well – designed and functioning decentralized decision-making process.

PRO-MESAS is experimenting with and demonstrating an approach to flexible local decision-making which is being observed by others. Collaborating donors are beginning to take notice and local participants are coming to understand the process, gradually internalizing the lessons being demonstrated. As an example, a group of municipal mayors are talking of preparing strategic plans for their regional government thus echoing the exercise they were led to engage in to prepare their submission for PRO-MESAS support. This kind of learning takes time, however, because local organizations are weak and require considerable accompaniment in a learning and confidence building process. By encouraging them to meet a higher standard of decision-making and documentation, the program is contributing to significant enabling and governance results in the long term.

2.2 Multi-stakeholder processes

2.2.1 Context

In line with its adopted aid effectiveness principles, CIDA saw PRO-MESAS as a means to integrate its bilateral programming with national development plans in Honduras, specifically, the Poverty Reduction Strategy. At the behest of a number of donors, including CIDA, various sector related “*mesas*” were created post-Mitch to facilitate coordination and planning of joint reconstruction efforts. Key actors of the Honduran development community were represented and, although they had no power to enforce their recommendations, the *mesas* received strong donor support and were seen as an appropriate forum to lead policy and program development for implementation of the PRS. Some of these Mesas initially seemed to serve their expected purpose while others never really got adequately established.

When the PRO-MESAS program was conceived, CIDA anticipated that the *mesas* would provide multi-stakeholder focal points for sector oriented interventions in Honduras and that they would be institutionalized as the principal government/donor co-ordination mechanism. They would serve as the main forums for deciding which projects and activities CIDA would support in Honduras. Resident Canadian sector specialists would advise their appropriate *mesa* groupings and participate in program development. Decisions taken at this level would be implemented through a Honduras based procurement agent, the UNDP Business Unit, thus bringing operational decisions closer to where things would be going on. While local and regional forums for similar planning processes were alluded to, these were clearly subsidiary to the *mesas sectoriales* in CIDA’s planning.

Currently, the *mesas* are not functioning in the manner anticipated and most are defunct or reduced in influence. This has meant that the PRO-MESAS program evolved in a manner distinct from the original intentions. The rest of this section synthesizes the expectations and observations of the program team members with respect to the *mesas* as originally created and on the importance of facilitating multi-stakeholder dialogue spaces and processes for collaborative work and decentralized decision-making at all levels.

2.2.2 Team member expectations and views

A number of team members indicated positive expectations for the *mesas* and saw them as a forum where civil society could present their views and be heard along with donors, development banks, and public organizations. However, most respondents were less convinced, even initially, about the potential for working with *mesas* convened by government entities at the national level. They felt that *mesas* mostly served as a donor forum to coordinate their interventions along with those of the government in a specific situation, the post-Mitch emergency. While the *mesas* were useful in this original context, government did not encourage their function as the development planning and decision-making bodies that CIDA anticipated. Some CIDA staff in Honduras, both Canadian and Honduran, recognized this situation early on and advised the PRO-MESAS planners against depending so heavily on this mechanism in their plans. They felt an unrealistic idea had been formed in Headquarters about *mesa* functions and that *mesas* at the national level were not representative of all society nor of the regions. At the local level, it was not clear what role national *mesas* would play and operational mechanisms were not defined.

The idea of *mesas* as tripartite (civil society, government, donor) spaces for dialogue, collaboration and initiative was embraced by all members of the team. It was only on the narrower, more structured, idea of “*mesas sectoriales*” at the national government level that they had difficulties perceiving functionality. At the local and regional levels, team members expressed great faith in the “*mesa*” concept for creating spaces to involve multiple actors in debate and a search for solutions to specific issues or problems. A sense of community orientation is needed and operational approaches for wider society need to be created.

Getting civil society representation and participation has been difficult. This is not unusual in a culture where traditional decision-making is individualistic in nature, dialogue is not expected and discussion may threaten authorities and their power. In the long run, the limitations of existing institutional processes and documentation needs to be overcome in order to release their braking effect on the benefits of collaborative work and integrated process initiatives

It was pointed out that tripartite spaces for dialogue and exchange have been valuable for donors. They helped identify programs with a focus on collaborative support and a number of integrated actions are in progress. Lacking the national level entry anticipated by the program, team members participated in the creation or identification of informal regional *mesas* (groups) where problems and actions were identified. One of these is with MAMUCA, an association of five municipalities and other local actors, which has defined a viable program. Formalizing processes and taking decisions has been a challenge but this is a learning phase which takes time. In this context, IDRC has provided training on tools for organizing and participating in more ordered and analytical multi-stakeholder decision-making processes.

Initiatives to identify and enter through existing forums at the national level have been taken by various experienced and well-connected Canadian and Honduran technical advisers on the team. For example, the Environment Minister is using a grouping of organizations under SERNA, including PRO-MESAS, along with working groups to develop policies. And, through a donor group which regularly meets with the Secretary of Education, the PRO-MESAS education representative is able provide a sector-wide management perspective while benefiting from the technical expertise of other donors. The forum provided opportunities to establish credibility with other donors and local authorities necessary for coordinated action and for influence.

PRO-MESAS team members initially participated in *mesas* related to forestry, agriculture, environment, education, and health. While these *mesas* are now barely functioning, opportunities are still being sought to promote more multi-stakeholder interaction through this mechanism. As an example of effective use of what opportunities may exist, at a meeting of the agro-forestry and agriculture *mesa*, the forestry LTA was able to advise the Agriculture Minister of a team in the Forestry Ministry working on an overall plan with implications for agriculture. He suggested the Minister get his own staff to meet with this group to coordinate their activities. The groups later met with positive results ensuing.

At the regional and local levels, the program is identifying and entering through existing forums. By asking how to reduce poverty in these areas, and supporting initiatives of already formed groups, PRO-MESAS is creating a web of dialogue spaces and contacts . The team is then selective in which groups it will support based on desired principles of collaboration, openness, and mutual interest. The choice of stake-holder partners is important and requires careful study before commitment.

2.2.3 Observations and lessons

A common response to decentralization and multi-stakeholder process topics was that there is a lot to learn and that progress is slow, requiring patience and persistence. Strategies and a clear agenda on how to move forward are important and a lot of diplomacy is needed. There is still a lack of clarity on how to use *mesas* and make them work at the national level and, without a clear government policy on mechanisms for poverty reduction, there has been no obvious reason for many of them to continue. They are most effective, and can help in making the allocation of resources more efficient, when focused on a distinct and mutually understood problem. It was noted that the utility of tri-partite spaces for dialogue, whether recognized as “*mesas sectoriales*” or not, will likely grow and be seen more clearly in the future.

A co-ordination role is important, especially with and for donors. This can be pursued in various capacities and spaces where multi-stakeholder interests meet or cross. There is need for a system and process that builds, is acceptable to government, and has the buy-in of civil society as well as donor support. All need to be involved in an interactive manner.

Getting to know and work with civil society parties is a particular challenge in tripartite, multi-stakeholder planning but one that is crucial in determining what clients need and want. As civil society develops a better appreciation of its proper role, and its strengths in confronting government to better serve its legitimate needs, the role of donors and their intervention may be reduced. A key challenge for civil society representatives is to develop a presence in the PRS Consultative Council to monitor its deliberations and present local views.

Multi-stakeholder processes are important and have far reaching influences. To be effective, they should be organic in nature, programmed in an open inclusive manner and, as much as possible, avoid the more rigid structures of traditional project delivery mechanisms. They can function at any level as well as across levels but should be purpose oriented and document their progress toward achieving that goal. When the purpose is achieved, or progress is not being made, interest and participation will likely fade and the utility of the forum will be reduced unless reinvigorated with new ideas and objectives.

The implication of these observations is that *mesas* and other spaces for concertation are likely not permanent fixtures and that their effective spaces for dialogue will be purpose driven and time limited. They can provide a dynamic set of renewable, evolving places for planning interventions and action responding to mutually identified and felt needs. In addition, *mesas* can feed into the functioning and evolution of existing political and administration structures by providing local operational views in juxtaposition to national policy and program plans.

2.3 Integrated programming and participatory project development

2.3.1 Context

The idea of integrated programming has been around for a long time and been attempted in many different situations. Some of the largest applications have been in the realm of integrated rural development programs supported by donors and governments in many developing countries. These programs mostly didn't work as well as expected because of centralized project planning and implementation and the lack of local participation in defining the content of interventions in their communities. Also, a sector focus failed to respond to the composite needs of communities and their organizations in the same way that they perceived them.

PRO-MESAS was originally conceived on the basis of sectors but the team has been experimenting with a dynamic and participatory, more organic, programming model applied at the regional and local levels. The comments which follow are summarized from team member responses.

2.3.2 Team understanding of integrated programming

Most respondents understood the purpose of integrated programming as a way of avoiding isolation in sector compartments by taking a development needs perspective on diverse, inter-connected issues and processes. The approach is characterized by multi-stakeholders dealing with cross-sector themes. More stability is anticipated from this approach as a result of considering more interests and taking into account the different perspectives of social, economic and environment issues.

Integrated programming is also perceived as a problem resolution approach in an opportunistic fashion looking for effective entry points and solutions. In the same line of thought, a “problematique” oriented approach following an integrating theme such as environment or water was suggested. In marketing terms, focus on the identification of a target group of clients with an important problem and build programming around delivering solutions to that problem.

Integrated programming involves a holistic approach to dealing with problems and recognizing the need to analyze a whole set of related issues in a locality or region. It requires mechanisms to address situations needing improvement or change so a community can advance. Key aspects of this are often people, their interactions and the need for a human development input.

Another point of view saw this as a multi-sector vision involving coordinated planning and a process by which actors from various sectors are brought together to intervene in an area or problem. The purpose is to look for a common focus and agreement to avoid duplication of effort and wasted resources.

2.3.3 Difficulties and solutions

Experimenting with an integrated approach was a new experience for team members who were mostly used to working in well-defined projects on a sector interest basis. It took some time to abandon sector-based thinking and it was difficult to get people to appreciate how the interests and budget of each sector were being integrated and programmed. Challenges were encountered in incorporating transverse themes and social issues related to education, health and gender. It was felt by some that these themes have to fight hard for their perspective to be incorporated in plans and programming. On the other hand, the area-based PI leaders feel they are not always getting the collaboration they would like on social issues identified through their local participatory planning initiatives.

Budget allocation is a challenge since it was programmed on sector lines but the demands of integrated programming bring to the fore a range of topics and points of intervention that go beyond priority sector boundaries. The team has been on a steep learning curve in how to respond to these demands and the PRC became a forum for discussion and resolution through the pooling of funds against which recognized activities could draw

funding. The PRC is therefore serving an important internal function to promote a holistic problem-oriented approach which goes beyond simple integration of sector interests.

Implementation challenges are also found with government and local organizations not accustomed to collaborative and non sector-based initiatives. In the natural resources area, common themes such as water or environment are serving as integrating concepts. It was suggested that models along this line are needed which can be replicated. The challenge is still one of achieving collaborative, integrated action with all stakeholders, donors included. There is still plenty of individualism requiring considerable facilitation to overcome.

Integrating health and education in local area programming initiatives has been a challenge on which there is some disagreement in the team. In part it is a function of regional versus national programming and building PRO-MESAS on the basis of earlier CIDA sector and regional development activities. Internal team discussions on these issues is ongoing.

2.3.4 Observations and lessons

So far, group synergy has been an important driver for integrated programming. Overall strategy, however, has been more implicit than explicit outside the water and natural resource themes. Education, health, and gender, have been difficult to integrate in the North Coast and Olancho regional programs for lack of a shared overall agenda. Some tensions exist on this front but the team has coped with this by mutual acceptance of outstanding differences.

It was emphasized that in negotiation of project content and focus in the PRC, comments from all should be heard and appreciated to make sure that ideas and suggestions are not lost. The PRC is seen as a forum to present, debate and recommend program ideas but overall strategy and program priority setting are not considered to the same extent, especially in those areas relating to cross-cutting social issues. It was suggested that gender issues may be at a particular disadvantage in this context. This theme does not control a budget and must depend on other PIs to fund its participation in multi-sector activities some of which may strategically find opportunity in areas outside those defined by area or sector-based programming.

These differences within the team reflect differing perceptions of integrated development and they highlight the challenges of implementing an integrated and participatory program. To be truly effective in a development sense, integration must take place at the community level where the target population decides which elements of the problems and opportunities relevant to its interests it wishes to address. The various sectors and themes on which national programming is usually built serve to provide supporting services and guidelines for important elements of these local initiatives and their context. Attempting to develop an integrated sector approach independently of local participation is likely to be ineffective and costly.

An example from PRO-MESAS is instructive. Area programming is based on the prior CIDA areas of Olancho and the North Coast and programming in the sectors of agriculture, forestry and environment. Health, on the other hand, has responded from an analysis based on PRS goals and objectives to define areas of specific need. Overall, the two do not coincide which has led to discussion over how programming can be integrated at this level. One obvious solution would be to use the same criteria for defining the intervention areas, especially related to the incidence of poverty. However, not all sector initiatives will necessarily have the same potential for impact in the poorest areas. From a different, but equally relevant viewpoint, CIDA needs to show some positive “impact” results fairly quickly from its program support to satisfy the Canadian government and people that tax dollars are being spent productively. It also must deal with cash flow, or time limited expenditure rates, which often can’t be met by a program defined only on the basis of an ideal concept of integration and participation.

Taking these various perspectives into consideration, it is unlikely that all components of PRO-MESAS programming can be, or necessarily need to be, fully integrated in the same areas or with the same groups. All initiatives, however, should clearly show how they contribute to the various goals of the PRS and local development.

The integrated, participatory programming process demands a high level of effort and interaction. As a result, it tends to generate high expectations and enthusiasm on the part of both local actors and facilitators who participate in intense interaction working together. There is thus an inherent risk that expectations may be raised unrealistically high and the program must therefore be prudent in managing this situation.

Development is a process of integration demanding patience and a lot of facilitation. People are learning by doing and experiencing in these processes, and require time to internalize the many messages coming their way. The challenge is to accompany clients in mutual learning with open minds. The role of civil society in this process is still being discovered and it was suggested that CIDA is an important pillar in the experimentation.

The specialist paradigm in participatory processes needs to take account of local knowledge and accept it as relevant and valuable. Local demands for services and inputs require attention but are usually more dispersed than in a sector-focused approach. Technical advisors need to avoid conflict over their specific interests and find ways of collaborating in an integrated way.

There is a risk, coming from CIDA headquarters, that the program may be forced to return to a strictly sector programming approach if it cannot show rapid explicit progress resulting from its integrated and participatory programming initiatives.

2.4 Organizational development for programming

2.4.1 Context

The success of the program depends very much on how the PRO-MESAS team organizes its interactions, processes, decision-making and communication. Excellent progress has been made in forming a highly capable and experienced team of dedicated and motivated professionals. The path has not always been smooth, however, and early attempts to operate in a completely horizontal, collegial and participatory manner proved inefficient and frustrating for some, especially from a CIDA headquarters perspective. As a result, greater structure and more explicit roles and responsibilities were introduced by CIDA in the September, 2003, document, *PRO-MESAS Program Results-Based Management and Accountability Framework*.

The team now functions in a much more systematic and efficient way. While some members feel this has resulted in less participatory decision-making, and not all voices are heard in the same way, much of the most important interaction within the team and with clients seems to have been preserved. The following comments summarize the range of views on these topics expressed by the team members on the themes of priority setting, program decision-making and leadership issues .

2.4.2 Team member views on priority setting

Original priorities were set at headquarters based on past investment in specific areas (Olancho and the North Coast) and sectors of agriculture, forestry and environment within the existing CIDA country programming framework. How the program would be operationalized was left to the local team with decisions on implementation to be taken in Honduras, i.e. decentralized decision-making. In 2002, long discussions among team members produced many ideas but, according to several respondents, nothing was concluded in practical terms. Only in 2003 when the team was complete and more structure was introduced were programming activity priorities set and approval processes fully established. (It appeared to the interviewer that, although the more formalized structure and priorities were established by CIDA, most of the content and operational programming decisions were a product of the initial highly participatory team process).

An overall team perspective on how priorities are set at various levels in the program was not evident even though everything passes by committees in which members participate. The most common perception is that these are set by the CTAs and PI leaders. Little mention was made by respondents of Honduran government expectations expressed through the Bilateral Commission to which the program nominally reports. An investment strategy document was developed gradually from a range of participatory processes but built on the prior support interventions and sector focus. Local priority setting involves a working methodology of facilitation and participatory planning at community level. Within PIs, PI coordinators and regional facilitators decide priorities in terms of programming. This is an activity-based program backed by a process of

documenting and approval activities. At the operational level, the UNDP office sets its own priorities in terms of scheduling its supporting services.

2.4.3 Views on programming structure and monitoring

As with priority setting, uncertainty exists among some members on exactly where responsibilities lie and where decisions are taken. This appears to be a carry over from the period when all items were discussed and considered by the PRC. It is also reflected in comments summarized in Section 2.1 on decentralized decision-making processes. The following observations provide an appreciation of current understanding and perceptions in the team.

The PRC is a technical and program peer review committee to which PI leaders present concept notes on proposed activities for approval and funding. The PRC is composed of all team members and written comments on NCs are submitted for discussion when the NC is reviewed. If the PRC approves the NC, it is then developed into a detailed Project Approval Document (PAD) including consideration of the comments provided and discussed at the PRC. The PAD is then returned to the PRC for final recommendation to the Executive Program Review Committee (EPRC) which provides formal approval. Decisions are recorded in meeting minutes of the PRC and EPRC. The Program Administration Committee (PAC) deals with administrative and personnel matters.

The new structure introduced PI sub-groups where a lot of the early participatory discussion on idea and program selection takes place. Although these groups are a subset of the PRC, and attempts are made to include representation of all major programming themes in their membership, there was a sense from a few members that these are dominated by the PI leaders. When NCs reach the PRC, therefore, they feel the course is already set and it is very difficult to change or introduce other perspectives. (From the interviewer's perspective, this is partly a communication and partly a documentation issue. Clearer communication of how the evolving decision-making process functions and provides spaces for collegial input would help as would better documentation of the consultative process involved in preparing NCs in the working groups).

It should be emphasized that, while these views were expressed, they did not come from a majority of respondents and appear to arise from an egalitarian interpretation of how the team should function. They do not represent a lack of commitment or belief that something important and dynamic is happening in this program. They need to be balanced by the view, expressed by many, that the system, while not perfect, is working. Discussion in the PRC is very professional and decisions or recommendations are arrived at by consensus. Minutes are recorded and circulated to all members for comment with changes made as needed. A number of comments indicated satisfaction that, with more familiarity with the structure and standardized formats, the decision-making process has become much clearer.

In the regional programs, i.e. Olancho and North Coast, field staff are satisfied with the process and the degree of participation and freedom they experience to initiate activities.

They seem to have a clear sense of their roles and see the approaches taken as an advance over their prior experiences in project implementation. They feel included and adequately informed of decisions and what is happening in the program as a whole.

Monitoring of follow-up on decisions and on programming is still very weak. It takes place related to specific activities but lacks an overall system. It was noted that tools are needed to better follow and record the sequences of informal processes and that LTAs should have a greater role in this process. While the data base of approved projects and programming decisions is quite complete on information for management, it does not so far capture progress in implementation. Information in the form of memos, individual work plans and activity reports does exist but where these reside and to what extent there is a system for assembling and screening them for trends and evidence of accomplishments is not clear. There would seem to be a role for IDRC here and many team members look to IDRC to provide the system for learning and systematization which underpins a dynamic and useful monitoring process.

2.4.4 Leadership

Given the original team operating focus on a purely participatory and consensus basis, leadership seems to have been underplayed. It was observed that at the beginning there was a leadership and decision-making hierarchy void. As things progressed, some leadership did evolve and was recognized based on knowledge and initiative. There was a clear sense that all are responsible to interact, provide ideas and get on with implementing the program. Some LTAs noted a boss-employee relationship developing with the implementation of greater program management structure. Nevertheless, most LTAs accepted their role as technical counterparts who provide strong leadership in program implementation. Professional respect among team members was evident from specific comments to the effect that the combination of experienced CTAs and LTAs in the team is a great strength. It was pointed out that this strength has led to a strongly integrated effort and a relatively rapid start in comparison with standard multi-sector projects. (In a normal bilateral project, most of the time-consuming planning would have been done in detail before initiating implementation. This would not entail the same iterative participatory planning and implementation process through which PRO-MESAS has evolved)

In order to maintain the collegial sense of team solidarity, but still introduce a bit more structure, a team coordinator was appointed who has the support and respect of all team members. This is an important position for maintaining the sense of responsibility, initiative and leadership inherent in the team.

2.4.5 Observations and lessons

Organizational development of the PRO-MESAS program has been a more difficult and expensive process than may have been necessary. Little guidance was provided from CIDA at the outset on administrative and organizational adjustments implied by the experimental pilot approach to programming. It had been assumed that UNDP practices

would serve program needs as well as CIDA accountability requirements but this turned out to be unrealistic. UNDP regulations were not suited to administering the multiple small activities/projects entailed within the overall PRO-MESAS planning structure. As a result, the team had to spend considerable time on developing administrative procedures and instruments, tasks outside their expertise and mandate, in order to adapt to UNDP rules. This slowed progress in implementing the programming decisions taken by the team through the processes described above..

Headquarters' decisions have affected progress in the program in unintended and unanticipated ways. The choice of the UNDP Business Unit as a procurement agent in Honduras was meant to speed bureaucratic contracting procedures at Headquarters and move decisions one step closer to where activities were to be implemented. This decision, while positively motivated, has strongly affected the performance of the team and development of the program. Other Headquarters decisions involving the EFA initiative took up important staff time and delayed preparation of the performance, management and reporting frameworks needed to guide the team and give structure to their implementation efforts. For example, the RBM framework is only now being designed and introduced. In addition, the allocation of funds to the EFA activity on the basis of convenience for meeting cash flow requirements has tended to distort other PRO-MESAS funding priorities and objectives. Funds allocated in a large early commitment are not available for other priorities developed in slower participatory planning mode with Honduran partners.

As already noted, CIDA representatives eventually established a clearer reporting and decision-making structure based on standard CIDA accountability practice. This was to be expected. Decentralized decision-making and administration was never a blank cheque to the degree anticipated by some team members. It was clear from the beginning in decisions and actions recorded in background documents in CIDA headquarters that Canadian accountability standards would still need to be met. At the same time, however, the team received signals that PRO-MESAS, as a pilot project, would be different and have greater flexibility to make decisions locally based on participatory development concepts. Current initiatives from CIDA are therefore oriented toward establishing much tighter control and direction on the program. At the same time, the team rightly seeks to protect the spaces for flexibility and "decisions-in-context" it has worked so hard to develop within the overall accountability structure.

2.5 Learning and systematization

2.5.1 Concept definition

Learning and systematization are important components of knowledge-based organizations and programs. A knowledge-based organization is one that encourages continuous learning on the part of its members and applies a systematic approach to capturing that learning so the organization can more effectively fulfill its purpose and respond to change. It seeks to continuously improve its processes, products and services

and thereby expand its capacity to produce results and meet its strategic and programmatic goals. A learning organization has the capacity to capture learning at different levels, individual, team and corporate, and use it to generate new, and broader, capability. Operationally, individuals are at the core of learning organizations while the team and corporate levels provide a supportive environment.

Learning is generally understood to be a process involving aspects of observation, activity, experimentation, reflection, awareness and internalization of lessons drawn from one or all of these aspects together. Often it is implicit or unconscious on the part of an individual but becomes more explicit through conscious, deliberate analysis and conclusions. Team learning involves shared experience and mutual assessment or appreciation of outcomes and their consequences. At this level it usually will involve some level of organization and analysis of observations. For most individuals, however, learning is a very personal experience related to their own interests, perspectives and activities.

Learning is closely related to and involves processes of systematization. This is especially true at the team and corporate levels where of necessity, common learning is more likely to reflect a deliberate, strategic and documented activity. Systematization assumes multiple actors or perspectives in a dynamic and complex social context where a common interpretation is important to inform communication, behavior, decisions and action. Common elements of a systematization process include:

- critical reflection;
- description of processes;
- organization of information and observations;
- interpretation of dispersed and less explicit, but relevant, knowledge; and,
- participatory interaction.

These processes lead to a result in terms of:

- extracting lessons learned;
- better understanding of current practice;
- documentation and dissemination of useful experience; and,
- follow-up action such as improved practices.

It means asking questions, integrating and internalizing observations and information in a systematic way related to a given purpose.

2.5.2 Team response

A synthesis of the responses provided by the PRO-MESAS team to questions about their interpretation and understanding of the meaning of these two concepts revealed a range of perceptions. These related closely to the role of the individual in the program. Those most closely involved in implementation responded in a “learn by doing” mode while team members with more general programmatic responsibilities indicated a more

analytical and heuristic appreciation. In general, there was a perception of these concepts having both implicit and explicit elements as well as personal and communal expression.

Much learning in the team has taken place implicitly and lacks explicit expression in the form of documentation and systematization. Most respondents understood systematization as a process of organization, analysis and synthesis/conclusions leading to action. In general, most indicated that PRO-MESAS does not have a strategy for learning, aside from learning through activities, but they definitely felt that this is needed. A few respondents felt that learning and systematization are IDRC's responsibility.

Key elements considered to be important by team members in the implementation of learning and systematization in PRO-MESAS include:

- Team meetings, training workshops, group interaction and enthusiasm;
- A clear methodology and work plans with clear expected results;
- Gathering, organizing and interpreting information to document results and assess how they can be extrapolated;
- Consistent feedback and monitoring systems, structured and thought through;
- Horizontal communication, respect, open-minded way of working, team spirit;
- Combined practical and theoretical experience avoiding specialist dominance;
- Taking lessons learned back into programming, modified processes and products;
- Constant questioning, discussion, comparisons and evolution of perspectives;
- At a national level, policies in support of learning and systematization;
- Concertation, planning, action and evaluation taken together in realistic ways provide for learning.

2.5.3 Observations and lessons

A more explicit initiative is needed in PRO-MESAS to take advantage of the large amount of personal implicit learning experienced in the program. This should begin at the individual level in order to capture and systematize the anecdotal observations of learning experiences mentioned by many team members. These perspectives can then be consolidated at the team and program levels to provide a documented baseline of learning which in turn can be used to guide new initiatives and priorities.

Learning and systematization beyond the individual level, whether at team, program, community, civil association, local or national government level, is a participatory process which needs to be facilitated and purpose focused. Learning how to do this is a challenge in a society where debate and knowledge-based discussion has not been encouraged and democratic decision-making processes involving concertation of multiple views is weak.

Leadership will be required to create an overall vision within PRO-MESAS of how to incorporate learning organization concepts into its processes and in the sub-programs and projects it supports. It will be important for all actors to participate, each in their own

environment and set of interactions, to capture the broad influence and potential impact of the PRO-MESAS program down the road.

2.6 IDRC role and relationship with CIDA

IDRC representatives provided conceptual contributions to the original PRO-MESAS program framework. It was mutually agreed with CIDA that IDRC could make useful contributions to the program by both accompanying it as well as developing its own related initiatives. Exactly how CIDA and IDRC initiatives were to complement each other practically in a synergistic way was not spelled out. Nevertheless, there was a clear expectation in CIDA documentation that IDRC would accompany and contribute directly to the learning processes involved in its programming activities. IDRC proposals do not echo this input in as closely integrated a manner.

The following observations are summarized from the team member responses to questions about the role and collaboration of IDRC related to the PRO-MESAS program.

The most common response was that the two IDRC project officers based in Honduras are fully accepted as members of the PRO-MESAS team and provide excellent participation and ideas. They are highly respected professionally, and as individuals, and their input is regarded as important and useful. Equally common was the expectation that since IDRC was responsible for the learning and systematization component of the program, they would take the initiative to design and implement these activities for the PRO-MESAS pilot program. This was seen as a very important role although it was not clear how this would be carried out.

Beyond this obvious acceptance and respect for IDRC staff, and a view of IDRC as a valuable partner, there was of a lack of knowledge and understanding of IDRC activities and of how they link to, and support, the overall PRO-MESAS program. This is in spite of the fact that IDRC projects, while not approved in the same manner as regular program submissions, pass through the same process of peer review by the PRC.

A view was expressed that CIDA and IDRC had been more together at the beginning, especially in headquarters at the design stage, but now IDRC was going off on its own in other activities. This was followed by some advice to IDRC from a CIDA perspective which in essence suggested that it could communicate better by being less academic and by simplifying its reporting. The Centre needs to show CIDA how its activities are contributing and put IDRC's work plan in parallel with CIDA's so the synergy between the two is more obvious.

It was also suggested that the PRO-MESAS program was not adequately taking advantage of IDRC potential input and there could have been more follow-up to training workshops organized by IDRC. Acknowledgement was made of the utility of the multi-stakeholders workshop, planned collaboration in watershed management and model forest initiatives. Input to the Chagas health project was also mentioned. But, it was clear

that IDRC programming is seen as something apart and not directly linked or supportive of the main program initiatives.

IDRC and CIDA have embarked together on a very complex and challenging endeavor. At the same time, they have a great opportunity to explore, validate and demonstrate the application of fundamental development and social evolution concepts in an operational setting. Learning and systematization, key elements of a research approach, are an integral part of the program and can be applied in creative ways to facilitate implementation. IDRC has an opportunity to make a major contribution to CIDA monitoring of the program by aiding and guiding the information gathering and learning aspects of key actors. The results of IDRC guided participatory research should provide feed back to the CIDA RBM monitoring system in ways that help both the program and CIDA to improve and document their performance. How this can be done effectively is a participatory research challenge.

2.7. Summary of observations

The parameters of the PRO-MESAS program were set within the context of a bilateral program arrangement between governments. A bilateral commission was formed to which the program would report and CIDA headquarters representatives, as “*members of the PRO-MESAS team*”, would “*pay particular attention to accountability issues and will work in close co-ordination with the Honduran government, civil society and other donors on an appropriate monitoring plan for the country’s development plan, particularly the PRSP*” (March 21, 2002, Memorandum from the Central American Regional Director to the Vice President, Americas Branch). This interaction was expected to take place within the context of the “*mesas sectoriales*” perceived at that time as forums for priority and programming decisions on a sector basis. The decentralization of decision-making implied was at this national level.

Some of the original assumptions on which the design of the program was founded have proved to be non-functional, especially the role expected of the *mesas*. What has evolved out of the creative efforts of the PRO-MESAS team is something more dynamic, based on the original principles and objectives, but with a markedly different implementation plan derived from an energetic and professional participatory process. Whether the same result could have been achieved more efficiently had more structure been introduced from the beginning is not clear. It might have limited or specified activities in a more restrictive way than what has evolved. What is clear is that a CIDA RBM structure has now been set for the program within which it must operate but the program maintains substantial and important spaces for decentralized and interactive decision-making. These spaces are located within the team as well as with partners and collaborators in specific initiatives and activities. They include opportunities for influence and collaboration in:

- what is left of the *Mesas Sectoriales*;
- national level policy and programming bodies;
- the regional and local municipal level councils; and,

- a wide range of groups representing civil society.

Many useful lessons can be drawn at different levels from this experience. An important one is the importance of having an excellent set of players on the team and giving them some room to be creative in defining and reaching for a common goal. The personal qualities of the members selected for the team, in addition to their professional competence, is outstanding. It is clear that the selection process has been a success and it would be worth noting the important features of that process so that it can be continued in order to maintain team quality as some members move on to other endeavors.

The team contains a good number of very experienced Canadian and Honduran professionals who are known and respected within Honduran government and donor circles. As a result of their personal contacts and being known, they carry a good deal of credibility and trust. This gives them an important entry and “convening power” to influence decisions, policy developments and delivery of supporting services to poverty reduction project activities of the program. This access can be used strategically to facilitate implementation of an overall vision for the program.

In the development of a new program it is important to allow time to put in place the organizational structure and personnel that will guide the program. Organizing, planning and implementing simultaneously can lead to confusion and less efficient performance. On the other hand, in this kind of program, it is important to allow leeway and spaces in the structure for reevaluation, learning and modification of approaches in a set of dynamic feedback loops. This dynamic includes time and spaces for participatory planning and implementation of development initiatives within the overall program structure.

It is important to recognize and anticipate the needs of various important actors, both internal and external to the program including donors, government, community leaders, civil society representatives, etc., and to develop strategies to manage these relationships. This requires a positive collaborative perspective and a good communication strategy.

To guide a program or set of activities, a clear and shared vision of what is to be accomplished is important. It should be explicitly stated for all participants and referred to often in making decisions on priorities and program implementation actions. This vision can be defined and linked into the RBM accountability framework as well as set within a learning process mode.

3.0 A SYSTEMATIZATION STRATEGY

3.1 Defining and recording results

From the existing documentation on PRO-MESAS, it is difficult to capture a good overall idea of what the program actually is and what it does. CIDA background documents provide a policy-based stereotype of what the program was originally expected to be and reporting requirements are based on that perspective. Considerable emphasis is given to statements of principle and to CIDA intentions of applying these while experimenting with more open ways of delivering its support in a set of pilot programs. The discussion is strongly CIDA focused and portrayed as CIDA and IDRC interventions in the context of the Honduras Poverty Reduction Strategy.

The program on the ground, however, is evolving in a practical way as some of the original expectations on the function of *mesas* have failed to materialize. The early perceptions of the team were that decentralized decision-making and participatory planning in a pilot initiative gave them a wide latitude to determine how they would work and develop the program. The result is a set of initiatives adapted to confronting national and local realities while still conforming to the spirit and intentions of the original plan. Nevertheless, there is some confusion in expectations and interpretation of the way actions and progress are, or should be, reported. From the interviews it was evident that a number of important and productive things are being done which are not documented but which contribute in useful ways to the principal objective of the program, poverty reduction in Honduras.

These activities were often described in an anecdotal manner without identifying them directly as programming inputs which facilitate outcomes leading to fulfillment of overall goals in a step-wise fashion. Some examples of these activities include: CTAs and LTAs facilitating discussions at national level sector meetings; the introduction of ideas to government officers; inviting the Ministerio de Gobernación to send representatives to a programming meeting with municipalities; meeting with groups in various locations to identify potential new partners; encouraging other donors to collaborate in jointly supported initiatives; and insisting on proper proposal preparation as a learning mechanism for local participatory action partners. Such activities are usually not recorded if they do not show an immediate, concrete, measurable result or change linked in a cause and effect relationship to anticipated program results.

These initiatives, however, can be shown to provide “enabling results” and should be documented as they occur to provide a trail of evidence on accompaniment of change. Observations made on changes in individual or group behavior, practice, and organization logically related to these interventions can legitimately be claimed as program output and outcome results. Recording such results helps capture the reach and real impact of the program over time. Periodical synthesis of these activity reports and observations will serve as inputs to reporting on progress toward meeting RBM expectations.

3.2 Vision and objectives

Capturing a good idea of what the program actually is and reporting on what it does in relation to expectations should not be difficult to execute but will require extra effort and inputs. As a first step, it would be helpful to provide a simpler and clearer statement of the why and how of the program. The ‘why’ is a simple **vision** statement of expected change focused on selected aspects of the Honduras government’s PRS. This takes the emphasis away from structure and process and identifies the subject immediately and clearly. It facilitates monitoring of progress toward achieving components of that vision.

The next question is “how ” will this vision be accomplished. This can be addressed through one or several **mission** statements that set goals or objectives which can be used as reference guides by the team as the program progresses. They can also be used to communicate succinctly where and how the program is working. Such statements might define:

- Areas or “spaces” in which the program is working toward achieving its vision and the application of the *mesas* concept of decentralized decision-making and participatory action;
- How the program will support achievement of outcomes by its collaborators;
- How the program will keep itself effective, efficient and relevant;
- Sets of interactions and their purpose at various levels, national, regional and local;
- What the program wants to grow into in the longer term Honduran context and in CIDA programming.

The goals and objectives clearly relate to program actions and interventions prescribed in the five program initiatives and program management set out in Section 1.2, Pro-Mesas design, and reiterated here:

- PI 1 Building Capacity at the National Level
- PI 2 Olancho Poverty Reduction and Sustainable Development
- PI 3 North Coast Poverty Reduction and Sustainable Development
- PI 4 Extension to Other Regions
- PI 5 Developing Learning Systems

Each of the PIs has two roles: a) convene and facilitate dialogue and decisions; and, b) plan and implement programs, i.e. development action.

An additional objective is to monitor management of the program in order to keep it dynamic and focused on obtaining, recording and claiming legitimate results.

3.3. An operational framework

Learning and systematization involve observation, information, analysis and synthesis. When there is an abundance of information from many different aspects of a situation,

documentation is important to capture the many perspectives, actions and results in order to analyze and identify instructive patterns and outcomes. CIDA has provided a reporting structure which defines expected results of the program related to objectives in its Performance Framework document but many of the activities and team initiatives at this early stage in the program are difficult to capture in that format except in broad generalities. There is a kind of dark tunnel between the specified indicators and outcomes in the plan and the results of activities being implemented at the operational level. How can the nuances and outcomes of the slow stepwise building and learning process which is under way be captured and interpreted?

Many important changes will begin as changes in behavior and attitudes of key actors, and in communities, factors not usually documented and reported by traditional project management. Information gathered and observations recorded on these elements provide feedback for learning locally, as well as for the program, and informs further actions and progress. In addition, the approach will simultaneously serve as a monitoring system for both the program as a whole as well as for each component part. Performance reporting elements specified in program documents include:

- Enabling results
- Development results
- Program management results

The first of these results tends to be difficult to capture and is often not recorded except in an anecdotal manner. The second represents the most common way of justifying program outcomes in specific terms. The third indicates how well a program has organized to effectively deliver the first two sets of results. The main focus of the systematization strategy suggested here is on capturing “enabling results”, including relevant program management results, within the framework outlined in the box below.

Capturing “enabling results”

- **Vision** - Goals of the Poverty Reduction Strategy
- **Mission** – PRO-MESAS programming and action areas, PIs, management
- **Activities** – initiatives of the team, projects and partners
(information from reports and recorded observations on activities/results)
- **Systematization** – synthesis and interpretation of relevant information to extract/identify trends, changes/influences attributable to program actions
- **Reflection** – regular, structured, team meetings to reflect on the implications of systematization reports and to take appropriate implementation decisions

The sources of information to be systematized are found in a variety of program and project activities including many of the following: workshops; formal and informal meetings; dialogue and consultation; consultant reports; planning meetings; studies on aspects of a variety of situations; etc. All of these can reflect initiatives/results at national, regional and local levels, or combinations of levels. While project reports are more likely to focus on development results, they too can contain information contributing to enabling results which should be captured and screened for relevance.

Gathering and organizing information on enabling results and program management serves a number of purposes. Some of the more important of these are worth noting. To keep a program dynamic and moving forward it needs to identify and capture new ideas, recognize new opportunities and locate additional resources. Input to these comes from a wide variety of interactions and collaboration with other actors including government officials, donor representatives, partners in projects and facilitating activities, civil society representatives, and casual visitors.

Information on enabling results can serve to better procure and maintain the support of higher levels of authority with an interest in assuring the effectiveness of the program. In the case of PRO-MESAS, these would include CIDA headquarters, IDRC headquarters, the Bilateral Commission and GOH officials. Closely related to this function is that of a good communication strategy fed by up to date and clearly presented information on program progress and results. This strategy needs to focus on providing CIDA with clear messages and reports which take into consideration the Agency's particular demands and needs for information. The Bilateral Commission also needs to be fed good information on what is going on in the program to maintain its support and to influence its decisions. In addition, the purveyors and interpreters of messages to the broader public, Canadian, Honduran and international, are responsive to good stories and clear evidence of positive results which they can use to inform their various audiences.

Finally, documentation and interpretation of "enabling results" can be used to legitimately take credit for contributions to positive outcomes in a variety of activities where no direct, cause and effect, relationship can be established. Along with reports on development results from more structured and substantive activities, this approach provides a richer, fuller, picture of the relationships and eventual impact the program is having. It also serves to inform the implementation team and feed into reflection on program successes, challenges, opportunities and weaknesses. This in turn invites consideration of modifications to organizational practices to better respond to the range of challenges and opportunities the program faces and how it can better relate to its partners.

In identifying results and systematizing program information, it is useful to separate out three kinds of results:

- **Direct results** with a clear cause and effect relationship., These results include identifiable and measurable products, changes or effects in a partner, in his physical environment or in related regulatory systems;
- **Persuasive results** are those which promote new ideas, new ways of thinking, changes in actions or in the behaviour of partners. They may also reflect contributions to mechanisms for improving the performance of partners.
- **Supporting results** are less direct, but nevertheless relevant and important to recognize. They derive from influences exerted through accompaniment and encouragement in such activities as support for networks, mentoring, facilitation of contacts, etc. As with direct and persuasive results, supporting results can apply to changes in individuals and groups or to changes in their physical or regulatory environments

The design and implementation of this suggested learning approach will be a challenge. Most staff find documenting their activities and observations a bother and have doubts about its utility. Nevertheless, a learning system depends heavily on a systematic observation, documentation and analytical process. The challenge will be to design a system which makes this recording as simple and quick as possible. It must not collect more information or data than it needs or will use, and must provide feedback in useful ways.

In order to capture more of the enabling activity results, the program needs to capture brief notes on many of the activities and contacts in which team members participate and to which they contribute. A simple form could be designed for staff to record their observations during or after each significant event and place it in an appropriate file. This could well be done electronically to facilitate later analysis and systematization of the information. Suggested content might include:

- Place and date
- PRO-MESAS activity (related to RBM headings)
- Theme or purpose of the event
- Brief observations on event and suggestions for follow-up

The design of this information collection system, its use and implementation will take significant effort, well beyond the time available from current team members. However, IDRC has indicated a willingness to entertain the formulation of a program support project which would focus on accompanying the systematization process in collaboration with CIDA. This initiative could also open up new opportunities for related IDRC support activities.

ANNEX 1

Individuals Interviewed

PRO-MESAS - Honduras based

Emilio Aguilar	<i>Liaison</i> rep., Dept. of Olancho, Honduran
Denis Buteau	Forestry advisor, Canadian
Trevor Davison	Commercial <i>liaison</i> rep., Canadian
Carmen Drouin	Environment advisor, recently arrived, Canadian
Maritza Guillén	Social equity advisor, Honduran
Manuel Hernández	Forestry advisor, Honduran
Zoila López	Executive secretary for the PRC, Honduran
Mario Pavón	<i>Liaison</i> rep., Costa Norte, Honduran
Gloria Palacios	Education advisor + EFA, Honduran
Camille Pomerleau	Programme coordinator, Canadian
Ana Luisa Posas	Agriculture advisor, Honduran
Stephen Potter	Project administration systems + EFA, Canadian
Margarita Puerto	Fondo Canadá para pequeñas iniciativas, Honduran
Carlos Rivas	Environment advisor, Honduran
Cecilia Sánchez	Gender advisor, Honduran
Frank Schneider	Agriculture advisor, Canadian
Lorena Silva	Development officer, Canadian Consulate, Honduran
Reid Sirrs	Head of Aid, Canadian Consulate
Raúl Zelaya	Senior project officer, IDRC, Honduran
Bénédicte Bucio	Project officer, IDRC, Canadian

CIDA-HQ

Robert Benoit	Project officer- principal
Lynn Paulin	Director, Human Resources dept.
Jim Sutherland	Central America Programme Analyst
Robbie Giles	Consultant, organization & training

IDRC-HQ

Daniel Buckles	Senior Program Specialist
Lisa Burley	Partnership Officer
Simon Carter	Senior Program Specialist - Director of Environmental programs
Denise Deby	Evaluation Unit
Philippa Wiens	Research Assistant, IDRC-PRO-MESAS

ANNEX 2

Documents Consulted

CIDA/ACDI	Strengthening Aid Effectiveness: New Approaches to Canada's International Assistance Program (2001) Document for consultation.
CIDA/ACDI	The 3B Pilot Initiative Progress Report: Towards a new model for implementation. (May, 2002). The 3B Support and Learning Group.
CIDA/ACDI	Honduras: CIDA Bilateral Programming Plan, 2001 to 2006 (Feb, 2001)
CIDA/ACDI	Memo to Len Good, (no date or author, 2001?) A report card on progress to date: Pro-Mesas Pilot Program
CIDA/ACDI	Investment Strategy: Pro-Mesas Program (December, 2002)
CIDA/ACDI	Memo to Bob Anderson, VP Americas Branch, from Paul Chambers, Regional Director, Central America. Honduras 3B Pilot Program – Pro-Mesas, Funding Decision request (Mar 3, 2001)
CIDA/ACDI	Informe Annual 2003, Programa Pro-Mesas (Mar., 2004)
CIDA-OCC	Oficina de Cooperacion Canadiense – Honduras. Pro-Mesas Medium Term Strategy, Discussion Paper (P. Chan, Feb. 2, 2002).
CIDA-OCC	Programa Pro-Mesas POA 2003 y Plan de Inversion 2003-2007 (no date)
CIDA-OCC	Plan Operativo 2004: Programa Pro-Mesas (Mar., 2004)
CIDA- OCC	Results-Based Management and Accountability Framework: Pro-Mesas Program (Sept. 2003) – incomplete draft
CIDA-OCC	OCC contracted report. Diagnostico de las Mesas Sectoriales (Aug., 2001)
CIDA	Alain Boisvert, interalia. Performance Measurement Framework – step 1: Pro-Mesas Program-Honduras, Rapport final (Mars, 2004).
IDRC	Building Learning Systems for Honduran Development: A proposal by the International Development Research Centre (Apr., 2002)
IDRC	First Annual Report to CIDA
IDRC	Memoria – Taller Lecciones Aprendidas de Pro-Mesas (Apr., 2003)
IDRC - CIDA	Various internal memos and program assessment documents.

ANNEX 3

Lessons, a Compendium of Comments

The following notes summarize the responses to the two final questions in the interview guide which asked what each individual deemed to be the most important things they had learned and, if they could, what they would change to make the program more efficient and effective..

1. Team member learning summary

The following comments summarize team members appreciation of the most important things they have learned to date through participation in the PRO-MESAS program:

- The importance of spaces for dialogue, for planning, monitoring and evaluation need to be recognized in a process of learning and continuing change.
- Important aspects of program development include: social development, local knowledge and local ownership of the process. The process of participatory planning at the local level is essential. At times, need to listen to local representatives a bit more – doing things too quickly can lead to errors and result in more difficulties and delays later on.
- Without adequate association and input from civil society, the program can't deliver a successful program. In the overall process, involving civil society representation gives confidence that the activities will receive support from local officials, groups and the wider population with a direct interest. Local resources can make a big contribution.
- Decentralization is fabulous! It provides opportunities to develop work plans in a team, for communities to define their priorities and demonstrates the effectiveness locally of switching to a multi-sector approach.
- UNDP services are somewhat limiting and slow, but an important lesson to note is that transparency through strict and open application of process rules is a fundamental and important tool for de-politicizing contract decisions. A model demonstrated and noticed at a local level.
- In terms of organization, creating the rules while playing the game is confusing and not the way to go. Define your systems and procedures, including roles and responsibilities, before implementing.
- A big team, bi-national and multi-sector in composition and with a great deal of mutual respect, following a participatory process has been positive. Faith in the process, consensus, commitment and expertise on the part of participants are required to make this work. Honduran organizations have observed this as a different and appreciated form of support delivery.
- It is important to have everybody on board the same programming process, especially headquarters, and the need for better communications.

- Have qualified people in the field with relatively flexible access to resources, adequate time to identify and seize opportunities, and ability to leverage and demonstrate results.
- Non-performing elements, whether program or individuals, need to be identified early and clearly so remedial action can be taken before they absorb too many scarce resources.
- Importance of learning how an open team process among professionals can function. There should be no fear of interaction and airing of differences in ideas and approach.
- The program has achieved partner trust of the process – an important element of effective programming and implementation. Coordination of initiatives and cooperation between donors and local actors is an important achievement. With a little you can achieve a lot in this mode of working.
- It is difficult to work in a team because not everyone shares the same vision and is more comfortable in their own sector or discipline of expertise.
- IDRC and CIDA are two different organizations with difficulties in communication at the corporate level.
- Collegiality is important but must be disciplined with clear purpose and responsibilities. Team members are really focused on problems and interactions but this takes time which needs to be better managed to make sure it is productive and efficient.
- Strategic alliances are important for implementation of projects locally and are being developed in a number of instances.
- The program is arriving at a good operational process in its programming and implementation. It is on a path with minimum risk of being mistaken in its support initiatives. But staff must realize that the program can't address all problems and therefore they must maintain focus and be selective in decisions on what to support. At the local level, people are learning how to confront and define their situation and problems in a participatory manner.

2. Changes or additions team members would make

Team members were asked what elements of the program they would change to make it more effective and efficient if it was within their power. They were also asked if they had any observations to add which they felt were important from their perspective. Some of this is repetitive of earlier observations but the comments are summarized here for completeness.

- Many respondents would change the UNDP service for something more rapid and flexible. Suggested solutions included establishing the service in the OCC or requesting bids from a consortium of Canadian and Honduran or regional based consulting/audit/management companies.
- The profile of programming and program management should adjust focus to more emphasis on social development and less on natural resources. Create a fund for small initiatives outside the sectors to support and legitimize

activities not covered by the sector funds but identified as important in PI programs.

- The management focus on accountability lacks a development vision in the country context but from a broader perspective, for continued support there is a need to demonstrate a thematic linkage to headquarters' expectations.
- The technical programming is very much subjected to the administrative. Work in the field should be facilitated, not delayed. Administration people haven't been to the regions to appreciate the realities of the implementation challenges there. Nevertheless, the program provides an excellent approach to the realities of the country and demonstrates important steps forward. The formation of local and regional technical personnel through experience in implementing a decentralized planning process is very valuable.
- There is a need for a communication strategy at several levels. Make clear who the program is working with, how, where and what results are being obtained. Find a way to create a vision of Canada's contribution and clarify it for Canadians. A workshop/training in communications for staff would be helpful.
- Sector specialists at headquarters should come to Honduras to work with the team and be exposed to the issues involved in working in a participatory, multi-sector context.
- Define an RBM and accountability framework with specified roles and responsibilities, including monitoring, up front to provide clear expectations and logic for program management.
- The peer review process is working well and provides programming supportive functions and quality control.
- Introduce a more global perspective with a more comprehensive view and mission. Give more credibility to the LTAs in decision-making.
- Improve management of personnel and resources to achieve more with what is available. Relate projects closer to country policies.
- Don't build an innovative approach on past connections and activities. This leads to taking on the reputation of the past, good and bad, and expending effort in reorientation.
- There have been some difficulties for new team members to enter and participate in the already established expectations. More awareness and mentoring would be helpful and speed the process.
- With PRO-MESAS you can program and build as you go along. This is important for dynamic development where reporting is better based on objectives with milestones, not on pre-specified and contracted results.
- Pressure from headquarters to implement (disburse funds) and from UNDP to follow detailed procedures leads to frustrations, team stress and errors.
- Time could be saved if staff paid more attention to detail in completion of requisition documents.
- Need to pay attention to dialogue with the government – this is a bilateral program. PRO-MESAS may be too much on its own and needs to take more account of where the government is focusing its priorities.

- The learning process needs to be improved along with introduction of a monitoring and evaluation system.
- The team and program have great potential but the dynamic is very introspective and project oriented. Needs a larger vision and strategy.